

## **CITY OF ROCKVILLE BEAVER CONTROL POLICY**

### **I. OVERVIEW**

The beaver is well adapted for aquatic environments and is found almost anywhere there is a year-round source of water. Most of the damage to public and private property caused by the beaver is a result of dam building or tree cutting.

In areas beavers move into, they seem to be stimulated by running water. They will quickly begin building dams to modify the environment more to their liking. Some of the surrounding timber is cut down and used to form dams.

Beavers prefer certain trees of woody species depending on availability; however, they can and will eat the bark of most species of woody plants which grow near water as well as a wide variety of herbaceous and aquatic plants. Beavers often will travel 100 yards or more from a pond or stream to get to an area where they cut the plant off at the ground and drag the entire plant back to the water. They eat part of these plants and often use the remainder as construction materials in the dam.

Beavers, the largest North American rodent, are active for approximately 12 hours each night, except for the coldest of winter nights. However, it is not uncommon to see beavers during daylight hours. Beavers have an average life span of 10 years and adults have an average weight of 40 pounds. The colony generally consists of four to eight related beavers. Beavers have few natural predators aside from man. Beavers are generally monogamous. The habitat modification by beavers, caused primarily by the dam building, is often beneficial to fish, reptiles, amphibians and waterfowl.

The beaver affects the environment, including:

- Urban wildlife habitat
- Plant succession
- Tree growth
- Soil building
- Ground water recharge
- Erosion control
- Improve water quality
- Tree destruction
- Flooding properties

- Changing hydraulics of storm drain systems
- Impact sanitary sewers
- Clog storm water management structures
- Create ponds
- Controls storm water velocity and loads
- General nuisance

In the City of Rockville, 22.6 miles of streams hold a large area of mature forest limited to stream valleys, which are natural habitat for the beaver. It is estimated that about 25 beavers may exist within our city.

## II. POLICY

The City of Rockville will practice **an attitude of acceptance of, and tolerance for beaver** activity as part of the City's natural environment and will foster this attitude among the public through education.

**Wildlife is a part of our common wealth.** All citizens benefit from common ownership, while at the same time assuming **a shared responsibility for wildlife's well-being.** In its role as the primary steward of the City's natural resources, the Department of Recreation and Parks recognizes that beavers are a natural and desirable component of the environment because they contribute to the quality and diversity of natural habitat. Conflicts arise when beaver activity impacts public areas, public health and safety, private property, or public infrastructure.

**The significance of the impact will determine what resolution action, if any, will be taken to reduce or eliminate conflict.**

Generally, where efforts are made to reduce conflict with wildlife, the most effective methods are those of exclusion; measures which deny wildlife the food or shelter which it seeks. **It is the responsibility of private property owners to take reasonable steps to exclude problem wildlife from their land.** In the case of beaver, these are steps which make the landscaping unattractive or unavailable. Private property owners should consider the following:

- Repellents are usually not effective and should not be relied upon.
- Sturdy fencing is the only foolproof means of exclusion. Individual trees are best wrapped with hardware cloth forming a cylinder standing six inches away from the trunk. Property is best fenced with welded wire fencing.

In the event that exclusion is ineffective or impractical, harassment techniques may be implemented. For beaver, these measures may include repeated opening of the dam or lodge, forcing the animals to seek new territory. However, it is against park regulations for private citizens to tamper with dams or lodges on public land.

If exclusion or harassment techniques prove to be ineffective, then as a last resort, trapping may be employed to remove the animals. State regulations control the final disposition of trapped beavers.

### **III. MANAGEMENT OF THE BEAVER**

#### **Definition**

Beaver management consists of all actions undertaken by the City for the express purpose of manipulating beaver populations and/or resolving conflicts of beaver activity, whether those actions are initiated by staff or are in response to public inquiries. It also includes any other action that may directly or indirectly impact beaver.

#### **Management Plan**

For management purposes, beaver activity that results in conflicts will be evaluated by the City for the existence of, or potential for:

- Impact to public health and safety
- Impact to private property
- Impact to public infrastructure
- Impact to public parks and facilities

The significance of these impacts will determine the type of management action taken, but all actions will follow established conflict resolution procedures. Beaver management actions will be based on the following:

- Proven wildlife management techniques
- Appropriate animal welfare concerns
- Problem solving
- Applicable laws and regulations

Under City of Rockville law, beavers are protected as a wild animal against harm or destruction on public property. State law provides for a legal winter trapping season for beaver pelts only; nuisance trapping is permitted by State policy. However, current State policy requires that captured beavers be euthanized and not relocated.

For each specific type of beaver activity, the City will develop procedures as follows:

- Public education and tolerance
- Exclusion, including but not limited to fence and screens
- Beaver pond mechanical leveler devices
- Harassment, including but not limited to the destruction of dams and lodges
- Population management, including but not limited to birth control, relocation, and euthanasia, as applicable to State law

#### **IV. ACTION PLAN FOR MANAGEMENT (Conflict Resolution)**

All public concerns about beaver activity creating conflicts will be first investigated in the field by City staff using the methodology below:

- Complainants, adjacent landowners, and homeowner/civic associations where they exist, will be informed immediately of policies and procedures regarding the management of beaver.
- Interpretive brochure covering beaver natural history and City management policy and procedures will be made available to adjacent landowners, and homeowner/civic associations where they exist.
- Beaver activity will be evaluated on an on-going basis for potential for conflict/impact in the urban environment.
- The significance of these impacts will determine the type of management taken, but all actions will follow established conflict resolution procedures.
- In the case of impacts to private property, the property owner will be counselled to accommodate the beaver and tolerate some inconvenience. Interpretive information will be provided as mentioned above, as well as information on exclusion methods. For beavers, exclusion methods typically involve fencing individual trees or property lines. Citizens must implement specified exclusion measures, where practical, before other actions will be considered. The City shall provide consultation services, as needed, and supply hardware cloth or chicken wire to protect trees. The City shall assume no legal liability for these impacts.
- In situations where exclusion measures are not feasible on private property, the City may take actions on parkland in order to address significant impacts on private property. Such actions will follow established conflict resolution procedures, beginning with exclusion, proceeding through harassment, and ending with removal of the beaver.

- In the case of impacts to public areas, the City may decide to take management actions to protect resources, facilities, and services. However, damage to trees on parkland, in the absence of other impacts, does not necessarily constitute reason for management. In order to determine overall impacts to natural resources, a field investigation of habitat suitability may be conducted.
- If it is determined that the habitat is suitable for a fixed number of beaver, the City may implement control, if practical, to limit populations. If these are not practical, the City will follow established conflict resolution procedures, beginning with exclusion, proceeding through harassment, and ending with removal of the beavers. .
- If the habitat is found to be unsuitable, and if exclusion methods fail or are infeasible, or if a safety threat persists, population management actions will be taken as described below. Whatever type of action is taken, it will be conducted in as humane a manner as possible, with due regard for wildlife habitat welfare.
- Citizen complainants, adjacent landowners, and homeowner/civic associations where they exist, will be notified of impending population management actions by the City.
- Population management actions will be taken in the following order:
  1. When practical, City staff will demolish the primary dam several times in rapid succession to encourage the beaver to relocate. All dam material will either be taken from the site or sticks will be cut into one-foot lengths to prevent re-use. All demolition shall be at the advice of the wildlife biologist.
  2. If no dam exists, under certain conditions City staff may disturb the lodge repeatedly to encourage relocation. This will be done with the utmost concern for the welfare of the animal(s) involved.
  3. If dam building persists or demolition is not feasible, beaver will be removed from the site by the most practical of the following methods, as determined by the City, in order of decreasing preference:
    - a. Humane live trapping
    - b. Humane destruction by euthanasia at the Humane Society

The City Neighborhood Services (CNS) will be notified of any impending actions involving humane destruction. If some form of trapping is utilized, CNS will be requested to perform trapping at their earliest convenience. If they are unable to meet the request in a timely manner, trapping will be performed by licensed/authorized trappers under contract to the City. A contract agreement and letter of authorization will be issued to each contractor. Every site will be inspected in the field by City staff or other qualified naturalist staff, with CNS or the contractor before the commencement of trapping. Euthanasia of live trapped animals, if that is the method of choice, will be performed by the Humane Society.

4. All beaver conflict actions will be reported and recorded by the City.

## **V. MANAGEMENT DECISIONS**

Beaver conflict action plan decisions will be made by the Beaver Control Committee (BCC), including the:

- Superintendent of Utilities
- Superintendent of Parks and Facilities
- Member of the Recreation and Park Advisory Board

Emergency public health and safety problems will be dealt with at occurrence, and immediately (such as sewer line backup or discharge).

Conflicts that cannot be decided by the BCC will be referred to the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board for decision and action authorization.

## **VI. PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE**

The City shall contract with an expert wildlife biologist with beaver conflict resolution experience, to assist in the overall objectives of the Beaver Control Policy for the City of Rockville, or utilize appropriate Department of Natural Resources assistance.

## **VII. ADMINISTRATION AND AUTHORIZATION**

The Beaver Control Policy will be administered by the Director of Recreation and Parks with authority provided by the adoption of this policy by the Recreation and Park Advisory Board. The Beaver Control Policy shall be subject to periodic review by the Recreation and Park Advisory Board.

Adopted: February 23, 1995